

Title: Interview with Michaela 'Kayla' Classing

Date: April 12, 2025

Location: Michaela 'Kayla' Classing's home in Crisfield

Interviewer(s): Sam Gundlach and Paige Cohen

Interviewee: Michaela 'Kayla' Classing

Introduction: Michaela 'Kayla' Classing talks about her time living in Crisfield since she was 13, moving in and out every now and then but mostly staying in Crisfield to raise her son. She talks about her views on how the city and state have dealt with the roads being flooded and the pothole situation in Crisfield, as well as talking about how the flooding interrupts her ability to get her son to and from school.

[Transcription begins]

Sam Gundlach (Gundlach): All right, my name is Sam.

Paige Cohen (Cohen): My name's Paige.

Michaela 'Kayla' Classing (Classing): Alright, I'm Kayla.

Gundlach: And we're here at Kayla's residence on April 13th to do an interview.

Cohen: And it's 4:37 p.m.

Gundlach: Yes, 4:37. How long have you lived in the Crisfield area?

Classing: I moved here when I was 13. I've been in and out since, but I've mostly been here since I was thirteen.

Gundlach: So, how long?

Classing: How long is that right? I'm 27, so, quick maths, I'm not good at this. 27 minus 13. Sorry.

Cohen: No, you're perfect and how has it changed since?

Classing: I'd say it's gotten about the same honestly. I haven't noticed a huge dramatic difference, but it's gotten- it feels more like a retirement home now, if that makes sense. A lot of

older people, you know. Younger people, they just, most of them just leave as soon as they graduate so.

Cohen: Now what keeps you in Crisfield?

Classing: Him upstairs. You know, we've got the kid and everything. He's one of those Crisfielders who are like, "I'm sticking around!" so I guess I'll stick around with you for now.

Gundlach: Tell us about raising children in Crisfield.

Classing: It- I think it's nice because everybody's in such a small area you're able to, the kids are able to hang out whenever and, you know, they can form bonds and grow up together. I think that's really sweet, actually. They've got the playground over there. I mean, as they get older, there's not as much for them to do so they can get in a little chaos, so. But for the younger generation, yeah, I think it's nice.

Cohen: What are some of your most cherished memories in Crisfield?

Classing: That's a tough one. Probably when I was a teenager. I don't know, you just hang out with your friends a lot and a whole bunch of good memories and I can't think of any one specific one right now, but you know, everything's better when you're younger. You just walk around and get into fun when you're kids.

Cohen: Now, how do you entertain yourself now in Crisfield?

Classing: I don't know, I don't really, I mean, if I want to do something I gotta leave town. There's not too much to do around here to be honest.

Cohen: Are there any community events that you like to attend?

Classing: No, I guess that's where I could be better, at the elementary school. They host little-little parents get-togethers, but you know, that's not all I am is just a parent. That doesn't appeal to me. But there are little events that they host, but, you know, they got the Crab Derby and this and that, but that's just every once in a while, once a year thing, but other than that, no.

Gundlach: Is there like a difference between the- the off season and the summer with like community events and stuff and things to do?

Classing: I think so. Most people are worried about working and everything, but I don't know off season, but I don't know what I'm- I'm thinking. But can you repeat the question, I'm sorry.

Gundlach: It's like, is there a difference in like community events between off-season and summer when it's like peak tourism season?

Classing: Oh, okay. Yeah, there's not too much going on here in the wintertime at all in regards to the summer, you know. But in the wintertime, it's pretty much dead and that's what a lot of flooding kicks up to, is in the wintertime I noticed so. It's not very popular around here at that time.

Cohen: Now, what role does the waterfront or the Chesapeake Bay play in recreation and social life in the community?

Classing: Well, like- like how people use the bay around here and all that stuff. Okay, just making sure I understand. Well, Crisfield's a fish and crab and all of that town. So, and a lot of people around here are the fishermen and crabbers. So a lot people rely on it for their- for their jobs and their families and all that stuff, you know, a lot of people are around here are fishermen and all that stuff so it's pretty important. So in that sense, you know, you need to make the money, need the money to take care of the family and we're money in the town, I guess. So it's really important for sure.

Cohen: Does- do you and your family like to recreate in the bay?

Classing: Not me personally, I guess, but he- he does stuff on the bay. He's- he works with his boss as a waterman, and he's been a waterman his whole life, so not me personally, but I know a little bit of it where it helps our family for sure.

Gundlach: How have the storms and flooding impacted water recreation in Crisfield?

Classing: Water recreation, as in like?

Cohen: Like just playing in the bay, you know, boating and fishing and all that.

Classing: I guess I couldn't say for sure. I mean, you know, it floods here, but I'm sure people don't go out when it's really flooded cause you can't get your cars through the flood or in the water. You know, you've got to drive the big trucks, but, you know, it's not flooded and everything's always covered in water. So I wouldn't know personally, honestly. It's a question I can't answer.

Cohen: Now, have you noticed any changes in the land, weather, water, or flooding in Crisfield?

Classing: I'd say it's getting a little bit worse. I have pictures I could show if you want to see after this, but just from here at our house, I could take a picture. I have some from 2022 where I took a picture right outside where it was flooded and it was just our yard. But then I took one two years later when it flooded again and the whole road and everything was flooded. So it's getting worse, I'd say.

Cohen: How do these changes affect your daily life?

Classing: Well, when it floods, you can't really, you're trapped. You can't leave. Unless you've got like the big high up trucks and everything, which a lot of people do. But you know, me personally, I couldn't leave, I've got a little- little car. So you're trapped pretty much until- until it cools down. A lot people park at Food Lion until it hunkers down. It can be like two or three days sometimes. So you really gotta know when the flood's coming and prepare in advance.

Gundlach: How do people typically prepare for flooding events?

Classing: Yeah, they either they take their car to the higher grounds, if they're in the flood area, and they go grocery shopping. If you go to go to the Food Lion, you know, a couple days before a flood it's- it's packed, you're gonna have a hard time in there and, yeah, that's pretty much it, they take the cars away. They hunker down, and they just wait for flooding to pass if they are in a flood zone.

Cohen: Now, do you have to personally prepare for flooding or severe storms that impact your ability to get to work or anything?

Classing: Yep, yep, I have to do all that stuff too because we're it- it wouldn't seem like we're in a high flood zone but we flood a lot right- right where we are. So yeah, I gotta go to the- to the store and stock up on water and everything and make sure I have everything I need cause I know I won't be able to leave once that flooding comes in.

Cohen: Would you say that the way that you prepare is similar to other people's?

Classing: Yeah, I'd say it's about the same.

Gundlach: Does it impact you getting to work more or just like everyday activities more?

Classing: It definitely impacts everyday activities, like I take my daughter to school, her school's right there at the Woodson Elementary and there was a period last year where school was shut down for like a whole week because nobody could get to the school, it was so flooded. And so that was a hard time and they, you know, they have to make up days, those flood days, because it's considered bad weather at the end of the year, so yeah, it's definitely hard to get around on an everyday basis if you take a kid to school for sure.

Cohen: Now, you're saying that to prepare for flooding, everybody goes to the Food Lion, stocks up, does everything like that. We'd love to know how long it usually takes for them, after they're depleted, how long does it take to get everything back, you think?

Classing: It doesn't take them too long, honestly, they get. It's more of the crowding. You know, they'll- they'll keep it stocked up, but there's so many people in there. You gotta- you gotta get moving. But they make sure it's stocked up for sure.

Gundlach: So are there any storms or flooding events you remember most vividly?

Classing: Yes actually, last year, and it was either December or September 2024, the flooding was so bad in our area specifically, right here, that it almost reached the top of our porch. I didn't see it that high yet before. And our yard had a current. We had boards floating in our yard like that way. It- it was insane. And it was like that for like the whole road. Like I could show you. It's insane. I made sure to get pictures for you guys after this, but it was, there was a whole current going that way all the way down the road. It was- it was really crazy. And that was a combination of the tide first and then the rain water on top of that. And that lasted like two or three days that bad flooding.

Cohen: Do you think that you were given enough warning to prepare for this?

Classing: Yeah, they let you know. I don't know how they know, but they'll let you know tide's coming, water's coming, you're going to better stock up.

Cohen: Our next question is, have you participated in any community events surrounding the issue of flooding?

Classing: I have not. I didn't know there were community events surrounding the flooding honestly, if there is any.

Gundlach: Yeah, there's the Crisfield Resilience Academy. That's the only one that I like off the top of my head remember, but that's- that's like about it. I think.

Classing: Well, I had no idea.

Cohen: Oh, yeah. I think a few people who we're getting to interview have been going to those. But yeah, I think- I can't think of any others.

Classing: Well, that's interesting. I had no idea.

Cohen: Now have you or anyone you know had to move or make major repairs to your home because of flooding or rising water levels?

Classing: Yes, my parents actually. They had a house at Windfall, just this road down here, and when it flooded, the whole back room would flood. You couldn't use it for anything because, you know, it floods so much it would- it destroyed the floors and the steps so that whole room was basically out of service. It would flood, you couldn't flush the toilets when it flooded, it was a whole mess and whoever bought the house now is, you know, they tried doing a little bit while they were there, but they eventually moved. They couldn't handle it no more, but the people who are there now I think are taking care of the house, but yeah, the flooding was hard on that house for sure. It's a very bad flood zone, and the house just got a beating from it.

Gundlach: Do you see a lot of people raising the homes more, or do they do other forms of flood mitigation when they're getting flooding in the home?

Classing: I have been noticing more people building the houses up. Like the most recent one was right along the- the shoreline near the kids playground. They- they lifted the house. You know, the library right there. They've got that real lifted up. But I've also been seeing like remodelings of houses, they're not doing, as far as I know, they're not doing anything to prevent the flooding. Which I think they should if they're going to remodel houses around here. That's what's taking them all out is the flooding, so if they are remodeling, I hope they are doing other kinds of prevention there, but I did see more houses getting built up on the- what are they called, pillars? Stakes? Something like that. They're getting built higher for sure. The new ones.

Cohen: Do you think that the younger generations are less likely to stay in Crisfield or, what do you think?

Classing: I'd say it really depends on the person. A lot of people have a really deep connection to Crisfield, it's almost like a cult sometimes, but they, yeah, they have such a deep connection to Crisfield that they want to stick around, but a lot people, they do leave like I'm sure, like when I grad, I didn't graduate I dropped out, but I left as soon as I could, but then I came back for whatever reason. But my brother, on the other hand, he grew up here as long as I did and he moved away and he's itching, like he's selling his house, he's coming right back. He's like, "I belong in Crisfield, I want to come back." But I guess it really depends on how much they connect with Crisfield.

Cohen: So, do you see yourself sticking around in Crisfield?

Classing: For now, yeah. Yeah, I think it's nice to raise the kids, keep them all in one school while they're young and everything, so. I'd like to leave one day. I don't wanna stay here forever. It's just not too much to do, and I wanna get out and see more stuff, so, but for now, at least, we're here to stay, so.

Gundlach: Have you experienced a sense of community in Crisfield?

Classing: Oh yeah, everybody in Crisfield is very kind, you know, especially, you get involved in the schools and all the teachers are very nice and I don't think I have many negative experiences at all with the people around Crisfield. Like you get the- the odd one, every once in a while, that's just nasty for no- for no reason, but most people around here are very kind and community, like it's so small, it's hard to not build a strong- strong knit community.

Cohen: Now our next- next question is about the economy. So how has the local economy, particularly industries like fishing, crabbing, and tourism, changed over the years?

Classing: I'm thinking, I'm sorry, I feel like I'm so bad at this.

Cohen: Take your time.

Classing: But I'd say it's- the tourism has gotten, I'd say it has gotten worse, honestly. It's like a few years ago they had the Crisfield Crab Derby and it was like this big whole thing. It was such a huge event for Crisfield and it's just, it dwindled so bad over the year because we can't bring- Crisfield can't bring enough money to buy neat rides and everything and more things to draw people into the Crab Derby. So, they can't make the Crab Derby as, I don't know, extravagant as it used to be to draw in more people. It- it's like a, you want this but you can't because you need this to do it, and it's like I don't know how to explain it. That's the main thing I can think of is the- is the Crab Derby. That used to be such a big tourist attraction and last year we had that- that blown up duck or something. Yeah, that traveling duck that was a big deal, but that was just a one-time thing where they would just try bringing a duck all around. It was like this big, huge blown-up duck. It was insane.

Gundlach: Yeah, I saw a news article about that, the world's largest rubber duck.

Classing: Yeah, it hung around for like a day. That was like a big deal. It was really cool.

Cohen: Now, what do you do for work and has it changed because of the flooding or anything?

Classing: I- I just stay home, I stay home mom, I don't do nothing so it depends on if I drive her to school. See if it's flooding, I can't get her to school, but I already said that, so yeah, I don't do too much, dude.

Cohen: Being a stay-at-home mom is not doing nothing.

Gundlach: That's a full-time job in of itself.

Classing: Oh, I appreciate that then.

Cohen: Now, how are businesses doing in Crisfield?

Classing: I'd say they're doing alright right now. I'm sure they could be doing better, but a lot of them aren't struggling unless they're owned by somebody who's not liked by the community right now. Like there's one downtown where the boss isn't paying his employees right so that one's dropping off a bit but with good reason so.

Cohen: How's the future of local business looking in Crisfield?

Classing: I'd say it- it could go either way. If more people who know about business come down and really take care of things, I think it could get better. But I notice a lot of the smaller shops getting bought by everyday people. I kind of feel like they don't know what they're doing a lot of the time. So, the shops will stay open for a year or two and then they'll close right down and

somebody else will move in who doesn't know they're what they are doing. So, it's just like, they're just passing these businesses along. But if you can get somebody who knows what they're doing to do their job, then they do alright. Like, I'd say his boss, he's been doing the water business for, God, his whole life, and he's still doing strong because he knows what he's doing, I guess. But a lot of people just they come down here and buy these shops and they don't- they have no idea what they're doing so they close down in a year or two. Somebody else comes in and repeat, repeat, a lot these restaurants around here do the same thing.

Cohen: I've heard other members of the community saying that they want business classes for the younger generation so that they're able to-.

Classing: Yeah, I think that be great.

Cohen: -you know, take on small businesses in a way that's manageable for the long run.

Classing: Yeah, I think that's a great idea.

Cohen: Now do you have any opinions on how the city, county, or state has handled flooding issues in Crisfield?

Classing: I think they're doing the best they can, like I'm not too sure there's a lot you can do about the flooding unless I'm mistaken. Like the water's gonna come, you can't stop it or anything. But they do their job, you know, warning the people and blocking off the roads, making sure you don't go somewhere where it's too far to get through. They're up and as soon as the water starts to rise, they close the roads off and that's pretty much all they can do, I think, until a different solution is found. But they protect the people at least, you know, I'm telling you, this water is too high, don't drive in it. You know, do it at your own risk. Some people get on their boats and go on the road and it's a little crazy, but they- they're doing what they can, I guess.

Cohen: That must be a crazy sight.

Classing: Yeah, it is wild. Yeah, they're just driving their boats down the road.

Gundlach: Do you feel that your voice and the voices of the other citizens of Crisfield are being heard by the government on a local and statewide level?

Classing: Is that- is it about technically flooding is it all about? Because I feel like one thing that I can think of specifically, I'm not sure if it's all the way up to the government, but our roads are awful. Like if you drive around there's potholes and they're seriously probably the worst I've seen and people have been asking for the roads to be fixed, you know, just cover the pothole, that's all we want. For years now. So many years. And they keep redoing roads that don't really need to be redone. But they're leaving the worst of the roads. That's the main thing that sticks out in my

mind. Like on the way to the elementary school, there's potholes so big that you gotta pause, wait for some people to go, then you take your turn and it's a two-lane street, so it's- it's a little crazy. It's mostly the roads that I'm thinking of with that. So I wouldn't say they're listening very well but- but that, anyway, that's the only thing I can think of right now.

Gundlach: Do you see those roads that are more damaged in like the flood-prone areas? Does it feel like the flooding is doing a lot of that damage?

Classing: I suppose the flooding probably doesn't help at all. I'm sure it's sinking the roads. So yeah, I guess it is connected in a way. But yeah, it's predominantly where the flooding happens.

Cohen: Have you noticed, what- what roads specifically have you noticed have been super-bad and which ones are the ones that are being fixed that don't really need to be fixed?

Classing: Well, there's this Windfall Road. That one is always so bad once it- once it floods, you know, just this one road over, that one's awful. This main road is- could also get really, really horrible and then there's another one over at Columbia Avenue. That one also gets very bad. And what's the road that kids want? There's another road that got, what's that road that got fixed? It's one of them. I'm sorry, I can't think of it right now, but there was a road that got fixed and I was sitting here thinking why do they keep fixing this one? I think it was one of the highways. They're fixing highways that don't really look like they need to be fixed. I don't know much about it so I'm sitting here talking out of my ass really. But they keep fixing like highways and stuff all around and it's like, no, fix the back the roads that we're having trouble on, not the main roads. They're fine. They seem fine to me.

Cohen: Now how do you think that the- because that sounds like, the potholes sounds like a city issue or a county issue.

Classing: Oh yes.

Cohen: How do you- how do think that city should go about hearing the opinions of its citizens?

Classing: I guess they could hold, like, community nights or something or just ask the people. I don't know, that's a good question. Cause I don't think we have many, you know, just like, not like a community night that I know of where people can voice their opinions like that. I guess I'm not sure about that. I guess, I wouldn't even, I mean, I know we have a- what are they called, mayors? Yeah, but, I wouldn't, I don't know. He should hold a community night; I think that would be good. There's a lot of places he could do that. But hearing the voices from the people, it's a good idea, I think. [The mayor in 2025 is a woman.]

Cohen: Now, are you hopeful for the future of Crisfield?

Classing: I'm hopeful. I'm hopeful that, you know, we can turn things around a little bit. I- I'm still not too sure what anybody could really do about the flooding. I think it's more of a- it's a wider issue than a Crisfield thing, I think. But I'm hopeful for, you know, people keep building their houses higher and, you know, accepting Crisfield over what it is. Like this is a normal way of life for us. I guess you know the flooding we deal with it, we know what to do. It's just whatever, but if you can accept that I think it's all right, you know, you can- you can learn to love it. So if you, you know, if you hope, I can't, I can talk. I'm sorry.

Gundlach: You're doing okay.

Classing: I've never been interviewed before, it's like all new for me, so I'm like tripping over my words, but yeah, I'm hopeful. Yeah, I am hopeful.

Cohen: What do you- what do you think Crisfield would look like in 20 years down the road?

Classing: Hopefully, we have more to do, honestly, cause there's not a lot here. You can go get breakfast at this place, or you can go and walk down the street. So hopefully there's more for like younger people to do. Like this is a great place, like I said, for like retirement. You want to retire down here, it's great, but if you're under, say, 40, there's not much for you to do at all unless you're, you know, just straight leaving town. So hopefully, there is more just for younger, even just a movie theater or something. Just a skating park. I think that would be great, a little skating park, cause a lot of people down here skateboard. I think I'll be good for him, but, yeah.

Gundlach: How do you think the City of Crisfield can help create these changes that you want?

Classing: Well, they could. Maybe they could start taking little donations or something, honestly. I think that would be a good idea. I'm sure a lot of people would donate towards something like that.

Cohen: Now we're getting down to the last couple of questions here.

Classing: Okay.

Cohen: This one says, what would you- would you recommend Crisfield as a place to live?

Classing: I would to an older person. Like if you don't want to, if you just want to chill out in your home and hang out with your little dog, I guess it's great for you. If you're not, if you're moving to some place where it doesn't flood non-stop, because there are places in Crisfield that it's always flooded, but you know, you just want, get a little area that's lifted up a little bit. You know, you'll have a good time if you're older, but if you were like a new, new married couple, I'm not sure you'd find a value in Crisfield if you've never been here before and you find its charm like a lot of people do. But for a somewhat older, you know, just by themselves and just

wants an- a quaint little town, you ain't got to drive far for a Food Lion, I think it would be good for them.

Gundlach: So what time in the past do you think is the best time to have moved to Crisfield?

Classing: I would say like 2012-ish, I think, was Crisfield's peak. That's when the Crab Derby was great. I feel like more people were there then, too. But I was also younger then too, but 2020, 2012 was like peak Crisfield, I think.

Cohen: For our final question, we have, what wisdom, if any, would you share with future generations?

Classing: Wisdom.

Cohen: The biggest question.

Classing: I know, I'm not the wisest person, but let me think here. Does that be about Crisfield? I mean, I am sure it's about Crisfield.

Cohen: Interpret it any way you'd like.

Classing: Okay, well, I guess deal with the flooding the best you can. I mean, if that's what you're going to do, you're gonna move to Crisfield. Deal with it but don't let it destroy what you, you know, your whole thing like. I can't- I can't explain it, just deal with it the best you can, but don't alter your whole life to make it work, I guess, because some people move down here and they. Thinking of my brother so much but he's like obsessed with Crisfield, he's wants to move down here so bad despite having something so much better. I- I don't know where I'm going with this, I'm so sorry, but just don't move down here not expecting the flooding to not be so bad, because it's- it's worse than they think. People don't realize how- just how bad it can get down here like. It comes to a full stop, so I don't know.

Cohen: Well, thank you very much. Is there any last thoughts before we end the interview?

Classing: No, that sounds good to me. Yeah, it was fine, I'm sorry. I have.

Cohen: Thank you, this has been great.

Classing: I've been, I've been so anxious, I've been so anxious about this.

[Transcript ends]